

# **TOWN OF NORTHFIELD, VERMONT**

## **PLANNING COMMISSION**

### **Minutes of July 7, 2021**

The meeting was held at the Community Room of the Brown Public Library, and was also streamed via the Town GoToMeeting account for the benefit of those unable to attend in person.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm by Chair Hill-Eubanks.

**Roll Call:** Present for the meeting were Commissioners Laura Hill-Eubanks, Nancy Peck and Aaron Rhodes. Ruth Ruttenberg and Chandra Blackmer attended remotely. Also present was Clerk Mitch Osiecki; Jon Ignatowski, Economic Development Director, and Natane Deruytter, Economic Development Intern, also attended remotely.

**Public Participation:** Introductions were made and guests were welcomed to the meeting.

**Set/Adjust Agenda:** Steven Toce cancelled.

**Approval of Minutes:** Aaron moved to approve amended minutes of June 21; (Mitch shared amended minutes in advance of this meeting); Nancy seconded. **Motion passed, 5-0.**

**Zoning District Discussion:** Jon Ignatowski reopened a recent discussion of the zoning district encompassing Freight Yard Way. This area is currently designated as Industrial. Jon would like to see this area rezoned to maximize its development potential.

Laura has discussed the current Town Plan with Clare Rock of the CVRPC. The Plan allows residential development in this area, but only if connected to commercial development.

Jon announced that he is currently out of the office and working remotely due to a health issue. He will be stepping down from his position, but plans to continue in the role for a short time to assist with ongoing projects.

He has updated the Select Board and Economic Development subcommittee on current activities, particularly with respect to redevelopment of Freight Yard Way.

The area is currently zoned Industrial, but that is not seen as the optimal designation for the area, given that uses other than Industrial generally have greater development value.

Jon is not proposing a particular vision for the area, but would like to understand what the PC views as the best route to optimizing the use of this area.

Laura: Asked if current owners are proposing requesting rezoning of this area.

Jon: Glen and Martha (owners of many of the Freight Yard Way properties) have not requested that the area be rezoned, but are definitely interested in the concept. Jon believes that Gillespie Fuels owns their lot.

Ruth: What might be the optimal use of land?

Jon: Community-centric users, things that seem inviting to the public. Added that uses that invite heavy truck traffic, noise, or noxious odors might be discouraged in favor of lighter-impact uses. The over-arching goal is to see more people in the neighborhood (not necessarily residential, but that could certainly be part of the mix).

Laura: Could some industrial uses be preserved in the area?

Jon: Sure. Would prefer to focus less on the zoning designation. Better, perhaps, to think more about creating flexible development standards.

Nancy: We need better definitions

Jon: Examples of flexible development might include things like office space, a brewery, perhaps a restaurant.

Chandra: Would like zoning standards to clearly exclude undesirable uses, particularly the storage of materials that could adversely affect water quality.

Jon: There is a former wood-working shop that hasn't been used as such recently. That space is currently being renovated as office space.

The Town Plan envisions commercial development in this neighborhood, but does not address stand-alone residential development.

Jon: Some types of light industry might be desirable. Heavy industry would not be compatible with the development goals for this area. Heavy industry is characterized by heavy truck traffic, noise, and noxious odors.

Aaron: Favors the vision of the area being developed in a way that invites flexible uses.

The Planning Commission is not prepared to make a formal proposal at this time, but is interested in continuing this conversation.

Laura: Would like more information about brownfield sites in this area.

Jon: Will work on preparing a summary.

Natane Deyrutter discussed a project she is working on, which will culminate with a proposal to develop a recreation path to connect Freight Yard Way, Dog River Park, and the Norwich Rugby Field.

This path will primarily serve as a pedestrian recreation trail, but an ancillary benefit might be to help generate interest in the development potential of the Freight Yard Way as people are drawn to the neighborhood.

Proposed path will largely use a Wastewater Easement to traverse lands of Norwich University, Town of Northfield, and Freight Yard Way property owners.

Currently preparing a grant application to fund the project.

**Other Business:** Laura is looking into a Municipal Planning Grant to engage consultant services for work on Zoning Regulation Updates.

*(Ruth had connection issues and disconnected from meeting about 7:40).*

A guided walk has been scheduled for Monday, July 12 to review the detour for the Main Street Bridge Project. Water Street/Wall Street/Union Street to Kenyon's Hardware. One concern is the potential for people to create a shortcut by cutting across the RR tracks near Fernandez Hardware.

**Zoning Administrator Update:** Mitch briefly discussed pending zoning issues. Not a lot of development projects in the pipeline at the moment. DRB is seeing lots of application for Sign Permits. Mitch is engaged in a few enforcement actions at the moment; progress toward a satisfactory resolution is occurring with some, but not all.

CVRPC will meet next week, with a representative from CV Fiber in attendance to discuss the work of that body.

**Next Regular Meeting:** August 4, 2021 at 7:00 pm.

**Adjournment:** Nancy moved to adjourn; Aaron seconded. **Motion passed, 4-0.**

Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.